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FREED AMERICANS GREETED AT CATHEDRAL

WASHINGTON -- A happy throng of over two thousand people greeted freed Americans who had been kept hostage in Iran at a special service in Washington Cathedral on Jan. 29, at noon.

An unprecedented burst of applause saluted Colonel Thomas Schaefer, defense and air attache in Iran, as he descended from the Canterbury pulpit following his brief address. The service ended with cheers and applause as the final verse of "God Bless America" rang through the cathedral.

The interfaith service, planned for months by cathedral staff in conjunction with the Family Liaison Group (FLAG), included readings from the Old and New Testament by Rabbi Mendel L. Abrams, President of the Washington Board of Rabbis, and Archbishop James A. Hickey of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington.

Moorhead Kennedy, one of the freed Americans, read from the Book of Acts, chapter twelve, about the escape of Peter from prison. He reported that he remembered this particular section of the Bible when he was tied to a chair in a Tehran prison and that it became a symbol to him of his eventual freedom. When he was released he was determined to read those words in public, he said, and received the opportunity at the cathedral service.

In his talk Colonel Schaefer thanked his fellow Americans for their prayers and added that he had waited a long time to say those words. "Thank God!" he said, "Thank God. We are free." He spoke of the importance of his life in God during his captivity, saying that he was alone with no Bible, that he could only turn to God in prayer and that God was no further than a prayer away.

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Speaking of his gratitude for the "love, the prayers, the bell ringing," Schaefer said that he and his fellow hostages deeply appreciated the honor being paid them in "this beautiful American cathedral."

Colonel Schaefer was speaking in place of chargé d'affaires H. Bruce Laingen, who was ill. Laingen's words from Iran had been read as part of the sermon during the Christmas service in 1979.

The Washington Cathedral had been the site of continual prayer and vigil for the hostages during the time they were captives and special services had been held three times during the long months: Nov. 15, 1979; Feb. 5, 1980 and Nov. 4, 1980.

At the first of the services President Carter, Vice President Mondale and Secretary of State Vance were honored participants, while at the second service the litany was read by Louisa Kennedy, wife of Moorhead Kennedy, in the presence of the Secretary of State and representatives from the Canadian and British embassies. Secretary Muskie and Warren Christopher attended the service on November 4.

Bishop John T. Walker, who officiated at the service of thanksgiving, greeted British ambassador Sir Nicholas Henderson, Canadian minister Gilles Mathieu, Swiss ambassador Anton Hegner and West German minister counselor Peter Bazing. Bishop Walker also led the congregation in a special litany of thanksgiving written by cathedral staff in which he thanked God, "For the example of their patience in the moment of trial, of bravery in the midst of suffering, of faith in you in the hour of darkness and of loyalty to their country in the time of imprisonment."

As the congregation responded, "We give you thanks, O Lord," Bishop Walker went on to speak of the reunion of families and friends, the "perseverance and sensitivity of the former President and leaders of our government, for those who negotiated the release with dignity and honor, and for the nation of Algeria, by whose mediation the agreements were made."

Freed Americans present for the service in addition to Kennedy and Schaefer included: Thomas L. Ahern, Jr., William F. Keough, Jr., Kathryn L. Koob, John W. Limbert, Jr., Regis Regan and Elizabeth Ann Swift. Also present was previously liberated hostage Richard Queen.

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Presiding Bishop John Maury Allin was present in the congregation and greeted the freed Americans and their families after the service. Bishop Allin had been in Washington to discuss the forthcoming visit of the Anglican Primates to Washington Cathedral from April 26 to May 1.

The cathedral bells rang out as the congregation left the cathedral-- the bells which had been rung half-muffled so many times during the four hundred and forty-four days captivity and which had been tolled daily at noon as prayers were said for the hostages. The hostage prayer, used by hundreds of people in the cathedral and elsewhere, was said for the last time on inauguration day, Jan. 20. Maggi Root, the aide who said the prayers at eleven a.m. on that day, said, "I knelt in Holy Spirit Chapel at the eleventh hour of the last day of the hostage vigil with the sure and certain faith that this would be the last, the very last time for these special prayers."

The cathedral was decorated with yellow flowers, a huge standard of yellow mums, snapdragons, tulips and forsythia in front of the lectern and yellow "ribbons" of mums and snapdragons around the wooden pillars of the rood screen. The flowers were the gift of Mrs. H. Bruce Laingen and the Family Liaison Group.

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PHOTO CAPTIONS

#81036/1 Clergy who gathered in Washington Cathedral for a special service of thanksgiving for the 53 freed Americans on Jan. 29 included (l. to r., front row), Rabbi Mendel Abrams, Episcopal Bishop John T. Walker, and Roman Catholic Archbishop James E. Hickey, and (l. to r., back row), the Rev. Canon Lloyd Casson and the Rev. Gabriel Duffy. Rabbi Abrams read the Old Testament lesson, Archbishop Hickey the New Testament, and both gave blessings of their respective traditions at the close of the service. (Photo by Morton Broffman.)

#81036/2 At the close of the special service of thanksgiving for the 53 freed Americans, held Jan. 29 at Washington Cathedral, Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop John Maury Allin congratulated Colonel Thomas Schaefer on his moving talk. Directly behind the Presiding Bishop, in the nave of the cathedral, can be seen ex-hostages Richard Queen and William F. Keough, Jr. (Photo by Morton Broffman.)

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